

subjects as nuclear waste and solar energy, but the secretary presides over the most inept bureaucrats in the land. (When Jimmy Carter created the department in 1977, federal agencies used the occasion to send it their least likable, least competent apparatchiks.) Richardson privately expressed grave doubts about taking the DOE job. His friends warned him that the department would be a thankless hellhole, especially compared to his cushy gig at the United Nations. After all, the DOE is so disastrous that most of its secretaries, no matter how able, depart in a haze of scandal. Most are never heard from again. But Richardson, always loyal, quietly complied with his boss's orders.

Of course, the inevitable happened. The DOE has proved to be a disaster. For one thing, there are the issues in Richardson's ambit. As energy secretary, Richardson serves as the administration's point man on oil prices. It's a suicidal mission: Richardson's job provides him with zero statutory power to alleviate the rising cost of oil, sue big oil companies for price-fixing, or make OPEC roll over and change its policy. But he's nonetheless the one who takes the blame for rising gas costs. To put Richardson's predicament another way: Thanks to the White House, when angry men pump gas as pricey as Starbucks coffee in the heat of summer, they'll conjure Richardson's visage.

And then there are the obstreperous idiots who dot his department—the people who brought you the Los Alamos fiascoes. How do you deal with chowderheads who let their employees take home disks filled with nuclear secrets? Or fail to report missing disks for 24 days? Not that Richardson hasn't tried. When a 1997 report by a highly respected intelligence expert recommended 26 steps to prevent another security breakdown, Richardson agreed to implement them all. He reprimanded his deputies, including the former director of Los Alamos. Richardson balked only once, at a proposal to create an independent agency to supervise DOE security. He rightly argued that this agency would usurp many of his powers. Still, he ended up endorsing the proposal anyway.

Perhaps Richardson himself deserves some of the blame for his predicament. Too eager to please, he constantly agrees to run fool's errands for his boss. A cynic might even call him a lickspittle. But is this such a horrible thing? Richardson fits into an honorable lineage of lickspittles—Washington insiders who take on tough jobs at their own political peril. Think of Henry Cabot Lodge becoming ambassador to Vietnam in 1963 or Howard Baker becoming Reagan's chief of staff at the height of the Iran-Contra affair. Like Richardson, both of these men deserved to be vice president—if only as reparation for getting screwed.

But now that Richardson looks like he'll be watching the 2000 presidential election from the sidelines, perhaps he can turn his attention to regaining office in New Mexico—maybe trying to become governor. After all, he's expended considerable energy maintaining connections with his old cronies. Then again, Clinton may have doomed him to failure even there. The White House has already forced Richardson to store nuclear waste in New Mexico. And then last month, with a little help from the Interior Department, Clinton outdid himself in his odd campaign to destroy his supposed friend: he burned down the poor guy's state. ■

Quiet diplomacy fails in Iran.

Silent Scream

By SETH GITELL

IN MAY, 13 Iranian Jews were put on trial before the Revolutionary Court in Shiraz on charges of spying for Israel. The charges echoed the Soviet Union's against Natan Sharansky and other refuseniks in the 1980s, charges that in 1987 prompted 200,000 Americans to take to the National Mall in protest. So you might think American Jews would be taking to the streets again today.

You'd think wrong. This time, the American Jewish community has largely stayed quiet—at least in public. At the behest of Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations and the man who has coordinated the community's efforts on behalf of the 13, American Jewish groups have eschewed large public demonstrations in favor of behind-the-scenes diplomacy.

Hoenlein and others say the backroom approach has paid off. Thanks to pressure from various governments and non-profit organizations, they note, the imprisoned Jews have been given kosher food, visitation rights, and legal representation for their trial before the Revolutionary Court, something almost unheard-of in Iran. But those are about the only concessions Iran has made. Not only has Tehran maintained the charges against the 13, it has subjected them to a grossly unfair judicial process marked by secret proceedings and coerced confessions. And if the Revolutionary Court, which is expected to rule any day now, finds the defendants guilty, they may face life in prison or even death. It's nice to have kosher food, but not if it's served as a last meal.

To be fair, American Jewish groups are in a bit of a quandary. Public demonstrations against Tehran, Jewish leaders and the prisoners' families fear, could provoke reprisals against not only the 13 defendants but also the 30,000 other Jews still living in Iran. "We cannot afford to create a circumstance that endangers them," says Hoenlein.

Instead, Jewish groups have placed their trust in the Clinton administration's quiet diplomacy. But that trust has produced precious few results, and Jewish groups haven't done much to hold the administration's feet to the fire. At the same time that President Clinton and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright have called on Iran to release the prisoners, the administration has also been seeking warmer relations with the Islamic republic. And, more often than not, the latter agenda has carried the day. In a March 17 speech, for instance, Albright paid lip service to the plight of the defendants in a strange, passively worded passage: "Governments

SETH GITELL is political writer for the *Boston Phoenix* and former national editor of the *Forward*.

around the world, including our own, have expressed concern ... for thirteen Iranian Jews, who were detained for more than a year without official charge and are now scheduled for trial next month. We look to the procedures and the results of this trial as one of the barometers of U.S.-Iran relations." Then, without waiting to see what the reading on the barometer would be, Albright graciously announced that the United States would lift sanctions on such Iranian goods as pistachio nuts, Persian rugs, and caviar. As part of the administration's charm offensive toward Tehran, Albright even volunteered that "the United States must bear its fair share of responsibility for the problems that have arisen in U.S.-Iranian relations."

After failing to convince the Clintonites to condition the lifting of sanctions on the release of the imprisoned 13, American Jewish officials privately pooh-poohed the decision as no big deal. While the Anti-Defamation League and the Conference of Presidents both officially criticized the lifting of sanctions, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), the pro-Israel lobby, didn't even bother with a public condemnation. Neither did the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, whose silence stood in stark contrast to the statement it issued two months earlier, on January 11, the fourth anniversary of American Lori Berenson's imprisonment for aiding a terrorist revolutionary group in Peru: "Today, in cities across the nation, in search of justice for Lori, we come together to say: enough. Let our message be clear: To President Fujimori and the Government of Peru we say: Lori's trial was a sham, her conviction is unsupported, and her treatment has been unjust."

One reason for the Jewish community's failure to influence the Clinton administration seems to have been, ironically, its refusal to rally public protest. Without visible demonstrations, the administration didn't fear a popular backlash against the sanctions decision. As Pooya Dayanim, a Los Angeles-based attorney who serves as spokesman for the Council of Iranian-American Jewish Organizations, puts it, "Wider knowledge of the American public and greater grassroots outreach would have enabled us to approach the administration to take a harder approach on this. This is an administration that is very eager to improve relations

with Iran. That has harmed some of our efforts." Quiet diplomacy alone also failed to stop the World Bank from approving a \$200 million loan to modernize Iran's sewage system, a carrot Jewish groups had hoped the bank would use to convince Tehran to free the prisoners.

In the face of these failures, the patience of some in the American Jewish community has begun to wear thin. In March, Democratic Representative Brad Sherman of California went to the House floor to denounce the lifting of sanctions, declaring, "There is blood in the caviar, bodies have been wrapped in the carpets, and it is time for America to say no until the thirteen Jews of Shiraz are liberated." Sherman was particularly upset that others in the Jewish community weren't similarly critical. "I believe strongly that we should have decried the change in the import rules," he says.

More importantly, Rabbi Avi Weiss, national president

of the Coalition for Jewish Concerns-Amcha, has organized rallies and prayer vigils, over the objections of Hoenlein and others, in front of the Iranian Mission to the United Nations in New York. (Ten rabbis were arrested at a Weiss-led protest on May 3.) The Simon Wiesenthal Center, along with members of the Iranian Jewish community, has held similar gatherings on the West Coast. In May, Elie Wiesel even placed an ad in *The New York Times* asking, "Is secret diplomacy really the only answer?"

The more aggressive approach has begun to pay dividends. On June 6, a group of American Jews, including Weiss and several other New York-area rabbis, met with the senior consul of the Iranian Mission to the United Nations. "Part of the reason that we've had these official meetings is that we've gone public," Weiss contends.

And the public approach may be winning converts even among those who initially opposed it. If the 13 are found guilty and given harsh sentences, some Jewish officials who initially backed quiet diplomacy say they will support large-scale demonstrations. "I am not reluctant to go to the streets," says Hoenlein, whose Conference of Presidents has recently sanctioned some low-key prayer vigils near the United Nations, "but you have to know when each response is appropriate." The danger is that by the time Hoenlein deems going to the streets appropriate, it may already be too late. ■

WHY WE MUST NOT BE SILENT.

Many of us have wanted to believe that the eleven "show trials" with their false confessions ended with the 19th century. Tragically, they have not.

One such show trial, in which the judge is also playing the role of prosecutor, is being held now in Shiraz, Iran. The defendants are in grave danger. These thirteen Jews, including one teenager, need our voices. Their names are:

Nasiri Behzadeh, age 46
Nasiri Borokhani, age 35
Ramin Farzan, age 35
Farzaneh Kashi, age 30
Farzad Kashi, his brother, age 25
Nasiri Lavi Haim, age 15
Yahya Zaid Mote, age 16
Ramin Vaziri, age 22
Shahrokh Pakshidi, age 22
Farhad Seidi, age 30
Rami Tefili, age 20
His brother Omid, age 25
David Lev Yaghou, age 16

Falsely accused of spying for Israel, jailed and tortured, their trial is taking place behind closed doors. Families, foreign observers and international media are all barred from the courtroom.

The brutal and inhuman methods of the Iranian police are well known. So we can imagine what torment, both mental and physical, these men endured before "confessing."

Their families live in fear, exposed to threats, their children abused by classmates. Moreover, Iran's Iranian newspaper announced that "all Jews are spies."

The consequences, not only for the thirteen Jews, but for all people of conscience, will be disastrous.

IS SECRET DIPLOMACY REALLY THE ONLY ANSWER?

Let one hundred thousand men and women - Jews and non-Jews who care - unite their voices to express solidarity with these prisoners and their families. Let them contact their local and state representatives in New York, in Washington, in every town in the world. Let the message be clear: that these prisoners have not been abandoned, that they have not been forgotten, and that their predicament is completely unacceptable.

And if this parody of justice will end in harsh sentences, it will provoke outrage in every civilized community. Then, Iran will truly become a pariah among nations, and it will have only its own fanatic rulers to blame.

WE CANNOT AFFORD TO REMAIN SILENT

Elie Wiesel
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ADDRESS: 1000 10TH AVENUE, NEW YORK, NY 10019

THE NEW REPUBLIC FOR THE JEWISH COMMUNITY, 1000 10TH AVENUE, NEW YORK, NY 10019

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